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Mt. Diablo school board OKs \$4 million in cuts, rejects charter school

By Theresa Harrington
Contra Costa Times

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CONCORD — The Mt. Diablo school board has cut \$4 million from adult education, counseling, intervention for struggling students, campus supervision, technology and staff training.

The continuing cutbacks forced by state funding reductions angered trustee Gary Eberhart, who laid into Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and state legislators at Tuesday's meeting.

"He should resign for the good of California," Eberhart said. "So should any other politician that advocates cutting funding for public education. "... I'm just appalled at coming here and having to make the ridiculous decisions that we're having to make."

An additional \$17 million reduction could come from employee pay cuts, furloughs or higher benefit costs. The board has asked the administration to begin such discussions, said board President Paul Strange.

Several school secretaries spoke in support of retaining their positions, recommended for elimination last month. The district had agreed to try to save their positions by reducing costs in other areas, but no new proposal has been made.

The board last month slashed \$12 million from its three-year budget toward a goal of about \$35 million. Because of decreased state revenues, trustees anticipate the district's annual budget will shrink from \$271.9 million this year to \$256.6 million next year.

To cut costs, Eberhart suggested reducing math graduation requirements from three years to the state level of two years. He also suggested allowing high school seniors who are on track to graduate to take four or five courses, instead of mandating six classes.

In other actions, trustees:

Rejected a charter school application, a decision supporters promised to appeal.

Agreed to place automated external defibrillators at seven high schools, starting with Northgate High in Walnut Creek.

Agreed to adopt the novel "Slumdog Millionaire" by Vikas Swarup in the district's 10th through 12th grade extended core literature list, over the objection of a parent who said she had collected 125 signatures against the book, which she said was too graphic.

Board members said students could opt out and trustee Linda Mayo asked for a follow-up report to find out how it is integrated into the curriculum.

ONLINE

More information about the Mt. Diablo school board meeting is available by calling 925-682-8000, ext. 4010, or by going to <http://esbpublic.mdusd.k12.ca.us> . Click on the Feb. 9 agenda.

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